

Wrestling Perspective

• Analysis and Commentary From The McLaughlin Group of Professional Wrestling •

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WWF Castoffs Could Establish Current NWA Stars

No matter what anyone thinks of their workrate, Greg Valentine, Nikolai Volkoff and most of the other wrestlers who will soon be a part of the WWF's housecleaning are recognized by the average fan. The NWA, still searching for an identity, would do itself a great service by hiring some of these soon-to-be unemployed wrestlers and use these familiar faces to enhance its company.

The NWA experimented with this concept in early 1989 when they brought in Butch Reed, the Iron Sheik, Bob Orton and the Junkyard Dog, all former Titan employees. That was during the George Scott booking regime and it basically failed as only Reed means anything to the company today. Admittedly, several of the wrestlers the WWF will be casting aside are years past their prime, while others are just top jobbers, but some still have a few good matches and angles left in them.

Of the wrestlers reported to be on the chopping block, Volkoff stands out as the hottest star. He was receiving a renewed push when Titan decided to cut him. The NWA could utilize him in short-term feud with the Iron Sheik in a battle of not only former tag team partners, but a war between two nations. While the match quality would be dubious at best, the NWA is obligated to pay the Iron Sheik for several more months whether he works or not. Putting him in a program with Volkoff could possibly justify his existence. Volkoff got over with pathetic matches with Boris Zhukov, so perhaps he could get over with pathetic matches with the Iron Sheik; an American answer to Giant Baba.

The NWA should secure Greg Valentine, as a blonde, as soon as possible. He, too, is extremely recognizable to the average fan. Though it has been a while since Valentine could work a solid match, he could be useful fodder for Lex Luger and Sting, both of whom, if they are anywhere near as good as their reputations, should be able to carry Valentine to a good match. Further, Valentine does have excellent ring psychology and could be useful as teacher for the NWA's top two babyfaces.

It appears as though the Honky Tonk Man is going to stay with Titan as a commentator, and that's unfortunate. Almost every fan has heard of the Honky Tonk Man and he has a very polished act. Like Valentine and Volkoff, he is unable to have great matches, but paired with the right opponent, he could further establish the top babyfaces and be a stepping stone for young wrestlers being pushed up the ladder.

Former NWA World Champion Ron Garvin was pretty much jobbed out during his WWF tenure. But, he has a history with the NWA and that could be used to their advantage. He could be a mercenary who only signs matches for the money similar to the heel turn in 1988. He was able to generate genuine hatred from the fans when he turned on Dusty Rhodes. He could be used as a hired gun by the Four Horsemen or work for Paul E. Dangerously. If there is a manager that could get over a mediocre wrestler, it would be Dangerously. Jim Ross could say how disappointed he is that a former World Champion could turn into nothing more than a paid street thug. Perhaps he could even be exposed as a scout for Michael Wall Street, or even the Black Scorpion. Who better than a former

World Champion who has lost his honor?

Lanny Poffo and Jim Brunzell could enter the NWA as mid-level wrestlers similar to Tim Horner and Brad Armstrong. In fact, they could start a good mid-level feud between Horner/Armstrong and Poffo/Brunzell as all four can be solid workers and this could finally establish Horner and Armstrong as top-notch wrestlers in the eyes of the fans. Poffo could certainly get over as a hated heel, and could probably transfer some of that hatred to Brunzell. Remember, Curt Hennig didn't nearly get as much heat prior to his association with Poffo as he did during it. The fans seem to enjoy hating Poffo and this could spice up some middle-card matches.

Paul Diamond, Jim Powers, Pez Whatley and Black Bart are also reportedly being released by the WWF. Diamond has a great deal of potential, as demonstrated during his runs in the AWA and CWA. With proper coaching and training, he could be a solid performer. He should be brought up through the ranks slowly as he's not ready yet, but given enough time with the right people, he could be a great one. However, it appears he will be part of the Orient Express, reuniting with Pat Tanaka and thus neither member of the team will be have and Asian ancestry. Powers' potential is questionable while Whatley and Bart would be suitable jobbers for opening matches to make them interesting.

Two wrestlers who have recently quit the promotion, Akeem and Rick Rude, could be solid acquisitions for the NWA. Rude is stuck in a long-term contract, but the NWA should express some interest while he sits it out. The moment he is legally able to sign with the NWA, they should get him as he is a solid worker, could get over initially as a babyface, and would be unbelievably hot with a properly executed heel turn a year or two down the road. Akeem would not get over as Akeem, but should he be willing to adopt the old One Man Gang gimmick and perform as solid brawler, he could also provide good matches and establish the top babyfaces. He hasn't shown a willingness to tour or for that matter work lately, but should he desire to do both, the old OMG could be an interesting mid-level character.

All of the aforementioned wrestlers have varying degrees of name recognition. That is an important factor. Some can work while others need to be carried by even the poorest workers in the NWA. However, that is not the point. The Night Stalker, the Master Blasters and Curtis Hughes are all poor workers and are virtually unknown to the wrestling public. Volkoff, Garvin and Valentine are known commodities and might be able to bring a few fans to the NWA matches who would otherwise stay away since they didn't know any of the performers. Once those fans are at the card, they can experience Ric Flair, the Steiners, Luger, Doom and Sting.

These wrestlers are not long-term answers to the NWA's problems. With the exceptions of Rude and Tito Santanna, who is rumored to be released by the WWF, none of the exiled WWF wrestlers would probably get over as a long-term main eventers with the current NWA audience. But they could provide recognition and a certain amount of credibility to the NWA if they are presented properly and subsequently, put over the right wrestlers. Anyone can be pushed, regardless of their talent, and if pushed properly, some may even be inspired to work and get over. Who would have thought Reed would work as well and be as popular as he is in the NWA a year and a half ago? Combine a good push along with some motivation, and there could be a few pleasant surprises in this lot of WWF castoffs. Many have more to give to the profession. Hopefully, the NWA will see to that and see that it is done right.

Sidelines

Thanks To Sheldon Goldberg and Georgiann Makropoulus for the plugs. We appreciate their support.

Mat Marketplace is a new publication put out by Sheldon Goldberg. It's a bimonthly classified listing of available wrestling merchandise from newsletters to T-shirts to tapes to Gorgeous George posters. It also features some interesting articles on collecting wrestling memorabilia. The first issue shows a great deal of potential as Goldberg is off to a great start. \$2.00 per issue from Sheldon Goldberg, PO Box 2371, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130.

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Book Review

By - David Skolnick

Bruno Sammartino: An Autobiography of Wrestling's Living Legend

Bruno Sammartino doesn't tell all in his recently published autobiography, but he does provide valuable insight into the early years of the World Wide Wrestling Federation as well as his own career. Sammartino seems hesitant to give the full story when it comes to the politics that go on in the business, but he does discuss his history of problems with Vince McMahon Sr. at great length. He devotes a few pages claiming he was never asked to lose a match and also denies intentionally juicing. However, if you read between the lines, you come away with a better understanding of not only Sammartino, but also McMahon Sr., described as a shrewd and selfish promoter whose company is saved several times by Sammartino.

The book begins with Sammartino's childhood days in war torn Italy. This section, which doesn't involve wrestling in any way, is perhaps the most interesting part of the book. Sammartino and his family, except his father, spent several months hiding from Nazi soldiers. Sammartino is not a professional author, but he does provide a clear and fascinating picture of his childhood days as he describes several close calls with the Germans. After the war, Sammartino and his family joined his father in the United States; settling in Pittsburgh. This is when he begins to develop an interest in physical fitness that evolves into a passion for wrestling.

Sammartino tells of his struggles and setbacks during his first few years as a pro. He tells

of his early experiences with McMahon Sr. and portrays the promoter as anything but a saint. One of the most interesting stories Sammartino writes about concerns his return to McMahon Sr.'s promotion after being banned from the business in the United States. According to Sammartino, McMahon Sr. got him reinstated by telling the athletic commission how sorry Sammartino was for doing something wrong and how it would never happen again. Sammartino writes that he had no clue as to why he was banned and, before the hearing, McMahon Sr. told him to be quiet since he would handle the situation. Sammartino later found out it was McMahon Sr. who reported him to the commission claiming that he failed to appear for a few scheduled dates. Sammartino did miss those dates, but only because he was not working for McMahon Sr. at the time.

If you're looking for an expose on wrestling, you'll have to look elsewhere. Sammartino defends his position that the sport was real during his day. However, prior to the two times he dropped the WWF Championship, he mentions that he lost interest in touring and wanted to stop defending the title. When he regained interest in 1973 and McMahon Sr. begged him to return, he somehow got scheduled to face nine-day champion Stan Stasiak and beat him for the title. No matter what Sammartino claims in the book, the knowledgeable fan can tell something was up.

Sammartino fondly remembers many wrestlers including Haystacks Calhoun, Killer Kowalski, Primo Carnera, Bill Miller and dozens of others. Other than McMahon Sr., and his son, Vince McMahon Jr., and one or two other promoters, Sammartino does not write anything bad about anyone involved in the business, with the possible exception being his son, David. Sammartino candidly discusses David's lack of focus and how his return to the ring to help his son actually caused resentment between the two. Sammartino also discusses the current wrestling scene; ripping the WWF and praising the NWA. Strangely enough, Sammartino never mentions his manager, Arnold Skoaland.

Overall, the book is an enjoyable read with many fascinating stories about Sammartino's career and the business of professional wrestling. Sammartino is set in his way and glorifies the old days, but, nevertheless, the Living Legend's story is an interesting one. Strongly Recommended.

Bruno Sammartino: An Autobiography of Wrestling's Living Legend is available from Imagine Inc., PO Box 9674, Pittsburgh, PA 15226 for \$14.95 + \$2.50 postage and handling.

Sexism and The Role of Women in Professional Wrestling

By - Vic Stanley

This article concludes Vic Stanley's three-part series on racism, classism and sexism in professional wrestling. Part I, racism, appeared in Issue #6 and Part II, classism, appeared in Issue #9.

A few years ago when he booked the NWA, Dusty Rhodes stated on WTBS that "All women look alike when you turn them upside down!" In the background, Baby Doll blanched visibly at this statement but remained quietly subservient to her mentor. Although this has long been the attitude that the sport has held toward women, is this also the consensus among the fans? Is misogyny a prerequisite for the true male wrestling fan?

Women have always been portrayed as an amusing diversion in the sport of wrestling. Throughout the years, ladies' matches have been wedged in somewhere between the prelims and the midgets. Although the performers were quite often talented, they knew that the male audience wanted cat fighting and shrieking to satiate their chauvinistic urges. I must admit that I have always enjoyed it myself. The fact that the participants are generally much more attractive today than they were years ago has further contributed to the stereotype that women are here only to satisfy the lust of man.

I have always been a great fan of the Fabulous Moolah. I concur with Lou Albano that she is "one hell of a classy broad." I may have been the only fan rooting for her against Wendi Richter, knowing that the end of her impressive title reign was imminent. Moolah represents the best of the old guard. Even when she was "Slavegirl" Moolah in the 1950's, she bowed down to no man or woman. An article by Rudy Dusek in a 1956 issue of "Girl Wrestlers Magazine (Amazons of the Mat in Thrilling Action)" revealed just how tough the women actually were, although he would not put them in the same league with the men.

Vince McMahon Jr. was greatly responsible for the 80's renaissance of women's wrestling. The short lived Rock and Wrestling fad featuring Cindi Lauper/Richter vs. Albano/Moolah renewed interest in the sport. However, after Wrestlemania II, McMahon decided not to push women's wrestling because he didn't want it to upstage Hulkamania. McMahon initially thought that the combination of wrestling and rock would be the ideal vehicle for his "Final Solution For Success" featuring Hulk Hogan, but MTV was mainly interested in Lauper and the awful Slammy Awards. After the abortive push for the Freebirds with Dave Wolfe (Lauper's manager), the Rock and Wrestling concept was quickly abandoned. Female wrestling barely exists in the WWF today. Sherri Martel, the only credible female performer remaining in the WWF, is reduced to portraying the shrieking harpy slave girl of Randy Savage. Her matches with Sapphire were a disgrace compared to her glory days as AWA Women's Champion, when she was allowed to display her considerable athletic ability. The female as a respectable athlete in the WWF no longer exists. In the NWA, it never existed.

A few years ago, the AWA was a good showcase for women's wrestling with stars such as Richter, Martel, Mimi Lesseos and Madusa Miccelli. If the AWA brass was more perceptive, they could have capitalized on the situation since their male wrestlers were defecting on a daily basis. Enter GLOW and POWW: this new wave of female wrestlers looked more like Las Vegas showgirls, Hollywood starlets, porno stars and hookers than the husky, hardened, middle-aged women wrestlers of the past. It can be argued that GLOW and POWW are closer to the concept of mud wrestling and wet T-shirt contests than any form of legitimate sport. The women are chosen for their looks rather than their wrestling ability, although a few have improved considerably since their debuts. However, I have seen women suffer actual injuries because they simply should not be in there in the first place. Naturally, the same could be said for some male wrestlers.

The Playboy pictorial, various calenders, posters and videos do nothing to contradict the premise that sex sells female wrestling. Obviously, it is a good marketing strategy. These promotions are basically a stepping stone for athletically-inclined actresses to gain access to legitimate TV and movie careers. While it should be a more respectable pathway to Hollywood than the traditional casting couch, is there any difference between a sleazy wrestling promoter and a sleazy Hollywood director?

The LPWA seems to have developed an acceptable compromise between the looks and talent approach. Performers like Shelly Francis, Susan Sexton and Magnificent Mimi represent the new vanguard of the sport and are very talented and beautiful athletes. Mimi and Americana have parleyed their wrestling careers into film deals. Lately, some of the more capable GLOW/POWW wrestlers like Amy - the Farmer's Daughter, Heidi Lee Morgan and Gina Morelli have been appearing on the LPWA programs. More seasoned veterans like Judy Martin and Leilani Kai - the Glamour Girls - have also found a niche here. I have been impressed with the quality of many recent LPWA performances. If

nothing else, they can be entertaining, which is more than can be said for many men's federations.

For some incomprehensible reason, the Women's Movement has never gone after professional wrestling for the way females are portrayed. Perhaps they are ambivalent because the business has opened up a whole new job market for today's athletically-liberated women. However, the sordid world of valets, managers, girlfriends, wives, ex-wives and sex slaves is still shamelessly exploited in wrestling. As long as there are beautiful women willing to be portrayed in this manner, can the men be solely blamed?

Blatant examples of sexism perpetuate professional wrestling. Nancy Sullivan's old Fallen Angel portrayal of the satanic beastmaster's brainwashed sexual slave was enough to set the Women's Movement back 50 years. Only Queen Sherri comes close to this extreme. At least Sullivan as Robin Green/Woman was her own boss, although she was not exactly an ideal role model for impressionable young female fans. World Class has featured a revolving door of prissy valets including Sunshine, Sunshine 2/Precious, Baby Doll and Missy Hyatt who would all betray their men at the drop of a garter. Today in the NWA, the female angle seems to have been dropped for the moment. Only Hyatt remains employed, although the circumstances are tenuous at best, and she does not exactly come across as an intellectual while alluding to being ultimately available to entire football teams.

Today, the USWA vigorously perpetuates the bimbo tradition with their endless stream of bleached blondes interfering in matches and upstaging the men. Unit recently, the highlight of a typical USWA show is a catfight between any combinations of Chris Adams' wives. After the inevitable double teaming, Toni Adams' skintight skirt is pulled up to her waist and she is spanked on her scantily-pantied behind by some big male beast to the drooling delight of the macho crowd. Was I wrong in crying foul at the TV censoring of this event? I personally felt cheated. Obviously, I am suffering from mixed emotions about this situation. Is it hypocritical for a self-avowed champion of civil rights to find this type of sexism acceptable and even enjoyable?

Although the portrayal of women in wrestling is no more exploitive than in mainstream films and TV, neither medium can be considered a proper blueprint for the role of women in today's society. It is obvious that most women have no wish to emulate Peg Bundy or even Rosanne, but their characters can still be enjoyed as camp humor. In the real world however, the concept of sexism is archaic. Big business has already greatly benefited from the contributions made by women. Perhaps the wrestling industry should keep this in mind. It would be very interesting to see what a female booking committee could do. Would wrestling become a "kinder, gentler" sport, or would it take unexpected turns that could attract an entire segment of the public that up until now has disregarded it as "male chauvinist entertainment?"

Jim and Stan Taking The Midnight Train Out of Georgia

By - Paul J. MacArthur

With the departures of Jim Cornette and Stan Lane, once again, World Championship Wrestling's management has shown their complete inability to run a wrestling organization. Why, other than complete ineptitude, would an organization create a situation where two-thirds of the greatest tag team attraction in wrestling would find it preferable to walk out on six-figure contracts than stay with the company? Why, other than a lack of understanding about the wrestling business, would an organization create a situation where the third member is staying, not out of loyalty, but out of financial necessity? Why, other

than pathetic office politics, would an organization encourage the break up of the best team in wrestling, as the NWA did in February, and then, after witnessing the team provide the three best matches of 1990 in the United States, still insist on burying the team?

When The Midnight Express returned to the NWA in June 1989, they quickly reestablished themselves as one of the top two or three teams in wrestling. Though their work was not quite up to the lofty standards they set prior to their departure, it was still good enough to make their matches with the Freebirds solid and, often, the best match on many house show cards. What's more impressive is this was often done without Terry Gordy. It was also at a time when Sting vs. Muta and Ric Flair vs. Terry Funk matches were on the same cards. The Midnight Express was a popular babyface team, fans responded to them and even though they put over Michael Hayes and Jimmy Garvin, they remained popular.

In the fall of 1989, a well-crafted angle was created involving the Dynamic Dudes and the Midnight Express. Despite Cornette's popularity, he could not get the fans to appreciate the Dynamic Dudes until November, 1989 in Troy, New York. A near comatose crowd came alive with the introduction of the Midnight Express at the Clash of Champions IX. This was after the Freebirds, Doom, Dr. Death and the Road Warriors had all failed to create any heat. Enter the Midnight Express, who were cheered when they came out, carried the Dudes to a good match, turned heel, popped the crowd and generated enough heat to keep the crowd alive for the rest of the night. The Midnight Express, once again, got over as a heel tag team despite the unpopularity of their inferior babyface opponents. They later put the Dudes over, carried them to good matches and showed themselves to be top-caliber professionals.

After the series with the Dudes ran its course and the NWA management realized the Dudes were going nowhere, they decided, in their finite wisdom, to give the Midnight Express their notice. Enter WrestleWar '90. There were only two redeeming matches on the card: one was a Ric Flair/Lex Luger classic with a screwjob finish and the other was The Rock and Roll Express vs. the Midnight Express in a top candidate for match of the year. The four wrestlers and Cornette showed why the "Express squared" matches were some of the best of the 80's. They also proved they were still two of the best teams in the world. They went out to prove they were the best and showed it to everyone, except the faulty prescriptioned eyes of the NWA management.

Despite their sound matches with the Rock and Roll Express, a program was suggested where the Midnight Express would breakup, Bobby Eaton would eventually join the Horsemen, Cornette would continue as the best color commentator in the business and Lane would be phased out entirely. Cornette and Eaton were loyal to their partner and refused to agree to the proposed split-up, giving the NWA an all or nothing proposition. The NWA wisely choose to keep the Express. The Express showed their gratitude by consistently having the best matches on NWA cards with the Rock and Roll Express. They also did the same thing that spring with Tom Zenk and Brian Pillman.

At Capital Combat '90, it finally appeared the Express were receiving a long overdue push as they took the United States Tag Team Titles from Zenk and Pillman in what was easily the best match on the Pay-Per-View. Again, the crowd really didn't come alive until the Express came out, demonstrating they were still popular despite virtually no push for months on end. Once they received the US tag straps, however, there was little to be happy about. True, they were the act that popped the crowd at the Bash '90 PPV. True, their match with the Southern Boys at that card was the best match in the United States this year. True, they continued to provide consistently fantastic action with either the Rock and Roll Express, the Southern Boys or Zenk and Pillman, but the handwriting was on the wall.

When Ole Anderson took over as booker, he made a mistake that has to be considered a major blunder. He removed Cornette from his color commentator position. Cornette had emerged as the NWA's best color man, but Anderson, incorrectly, felt he lessened heel

heat. Please note he kept the Freebirds, only temporarily suspended Dangerously and Dutch Mantel was hired to do color for World Wide. Indeed, it was part of the continuing burial that plagued the Midnight Express upon their return in the summer of '89. As US Tag Team Champions, they put over other tag teams in non-title match in excess of 20 times. Finally, in August at the Meadowlands, 45 minutes before the start of the card, they were informed that they would be dropping the titles to the Steiners. Hardly courteous and definitely lacking class. True professionals, the Express dropped the titles at the Meadowlands, but again they were the first act to get any sort of reaction from the crowd on this Northeastern card of major significance. They also provided a fantastic match. But, the NWA's management was unable to read this barometer as no rematches of any meaning were ever conjured up and Cornette's ideas to continue the feud with the Steiners were ignored or discarded.

By Halloween Havoc '90, any question of the Express' future was erased when they did the job for Ricky Morton and Tommy Rich, an unestablished team who did the job for the Nasty Boys only days prior to the card. Still, they did what they do best: providing the best match on the card. Even though a program was set up for them with the Southern Boys, it was clear who would be the victor of the feud. Despite having the best tag team in wrestling, the NWA was determined to devalue them. A less than admirable business strategy. Finally, the blowout between Anderson and Cornette occurred. Lane and Cornette have left the NWA and Eaton will probably rejoin them in May. Perhaps then, Express fans will have something to cheer about.

One has to wonder why the NWA chose to act the way it did. With the Midnight Express, the NWA had the consummate tag team. Eaton is one of the best workers in the world, but lacks some charisma. Lane is a solid worker, one of the most charismatic wrestlers anywhere, very funny when given the opportunity, but like Eaton, works better in a tag team setting. Cornette is the best manager in the business, is an outstanding mouthpiece for the team, has excellent ringside presence, is a phenomenal color man and again, works best when he is with his tag team. The three of them gel together better than any other tag team unit in the history of wrestling, and that includes the early years of the Fabulous Freebirds. Night in, night out, they provide excellent matches, entertain the fans and get crowds into their matches. Very few wrestlers in the NWA are able to do that. Yet, the NWA has chosen to rid themselves of the tag team that does it with phenomenal professional expertise. With so few commodities in the NWA, why would they rid themselves of an extremely valuable one? Jim Herd stated in *Matwatch* that if the Midnight Express was as important as Jim Cornette claimed, they would be selling out arenas. But, until the NWA learns how to promote, no one in the company will sell out arenas. Ridding itself of one of wrestling's most cherished commodities will only result in a decreased interest in the NWA and subsequent decreases in ratings, attendance and overall success. Indeed, Mr. Herd, please think, why did this situation occur? The answer is politics: an inexcusable detour on the road to success.

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